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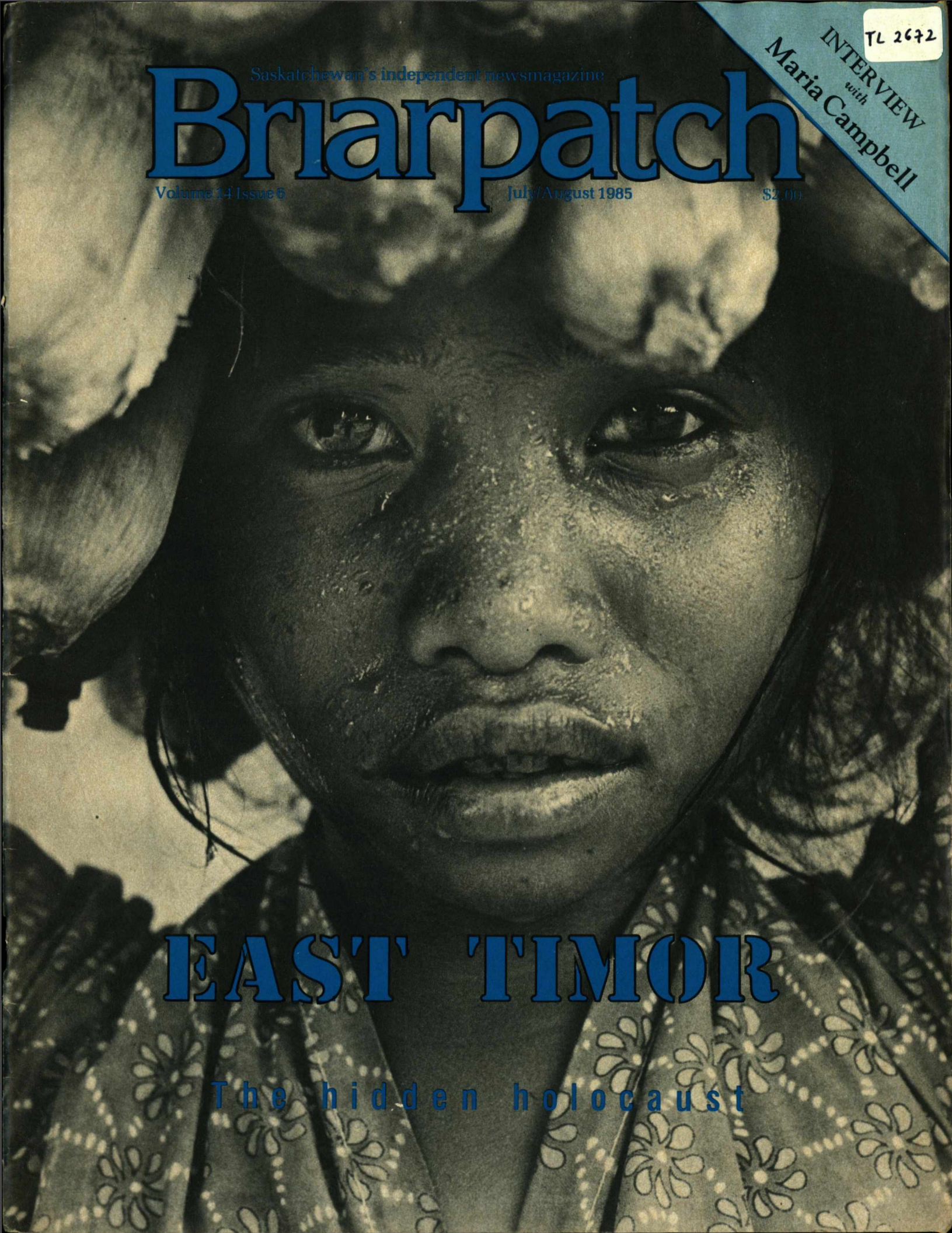
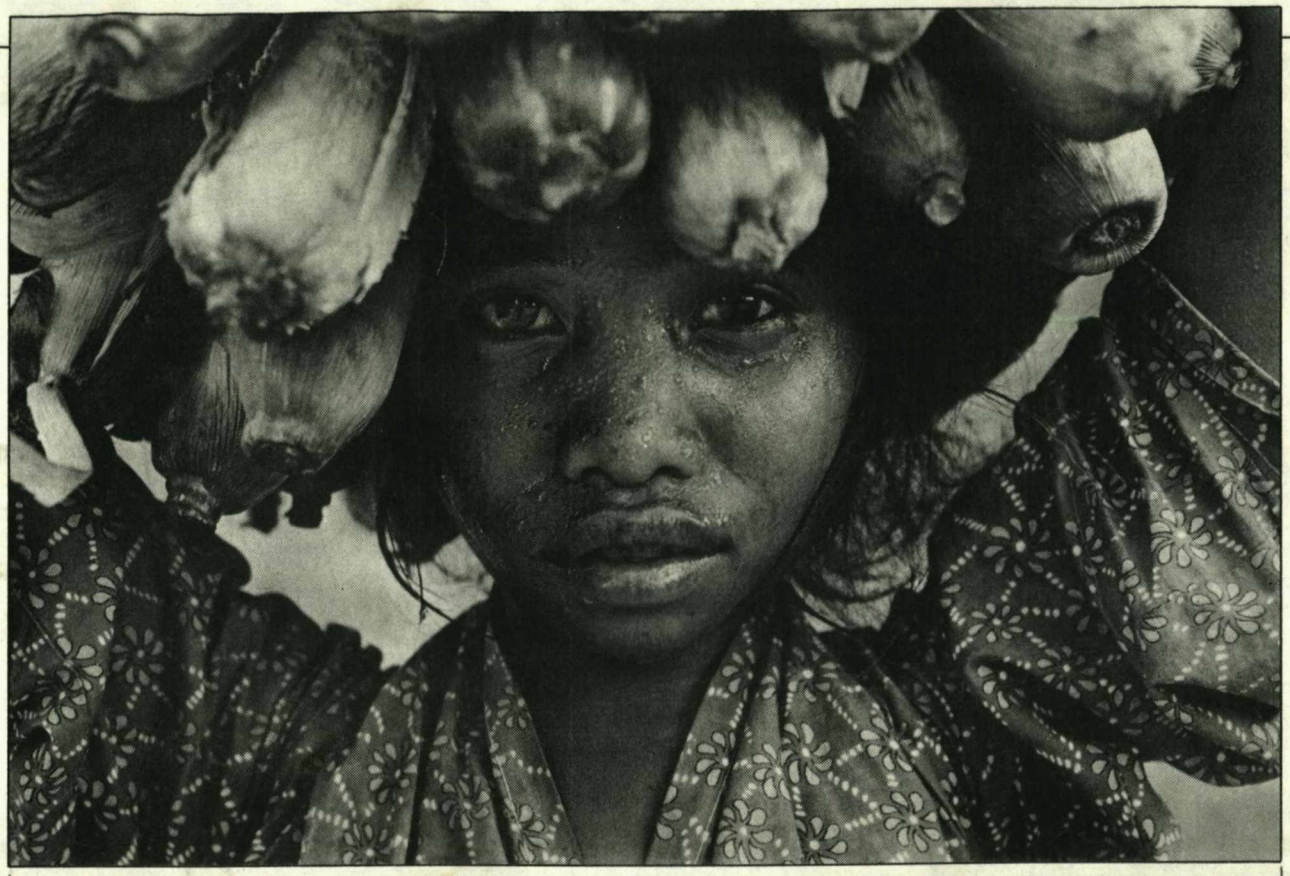
INTERVIEW with Maria Campbell



EAST TIMOR

The hidden holocaust



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How to hide a holocaust

by DEREK RASMUSSEN

ON DECEMBER 7 OF THIS YEAR, a terrible anniversary will probably pass unnoticed by most Canadians. A quiet decade of genocide in a place you have likely never heard of. On December 7, 1975, the tiny Southeast Asian territory of East Timor was invaded by its large neighbour, Indonesia. Today, the conflict in East Timor is rated by the Washington-based Center for Defense Information as the most violent in the world, relative to its population. Senior church officials in the predominantly Roman Catholic territory believe that more than 250,000 Timorese — over one-third of the original 650,000 inhabitants — have been killed or starved to death since the invasion. Their infant mortality rate is now the highest in the world: according to Washington's Population Reference Bureau, 211 of every 1000 babies in East Timor die before their first birthday.

The Indonesian military has closed East Timor off from the outside world, allowing only selected observers on carefully guided tours of the island. Recent attempts to report on the situation in East Timor led Indonesia to ban United Press International's bureau chief, Isabelle Reckeweg, from working in Indonesia. The Canadian media have ignored East Timor.

But the Canadian government is not blind to the issue: Canada supports the Indonesian occupation. Over the last decade Canada has abstained from voting on UN resolutions condemning the invasion and has, most recently, voted *against* resolutions endorsing East Timor's right to self-determination and humanitarian assistance. According to an External Affairs spokesperson, this position remains the same under the new Conservative government.

Located 300 miles northwest of Australia in the Timor Sea, the mountainous island of Timor is the same size as Vancouver Island. For 450 years East Timor was a neglected remnant of the Portuguese colonial empire, and developed into a distinct entity — linguistically, culturally and tribally different fron Indonesian-controlled West Timor.

In 1975, after announcing plans to leave the last of their colonies (including Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and East Timor), the Portuguese abruptly pulled out of East Timor. At the time, East Timor was embroiled in a month-long civil war which claimed 2,000 lives, according to the Red Cross. Fretilin (the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) was left in control of the territory. According to most journalists and independent observers, Fretilin had a majority of popular support as a result of its literacy campaigns, health programmes and agricultural reforms.

The Indonesian military regime felt threatened by the emergence of a small progressive nation on its borders — a possible inspiration for secessionist movements within Indonesia.

Fretilin wanted Portugal to return and ensure an orderly and democratic decolonization, but before this could happen Indonesian forces invaded East Timor. Twelve hours before the invasion — largely carried out with U.S.

photo: Elaine Briére

Indonesian soldiers and tanks: Are these tanks from Levy Auto Parts in Toronto?

arms — President Ford and Henry Kissinger visited Indonesia and gave approval for its position on East Timor.

East Timorese priests and refugees paint a grim picture of the Indonesian invasion and occupation, characterized by indiscriminate mass killings, torture, rape, looting, saturation bombing and defoliation using napalm and chemical weapons.

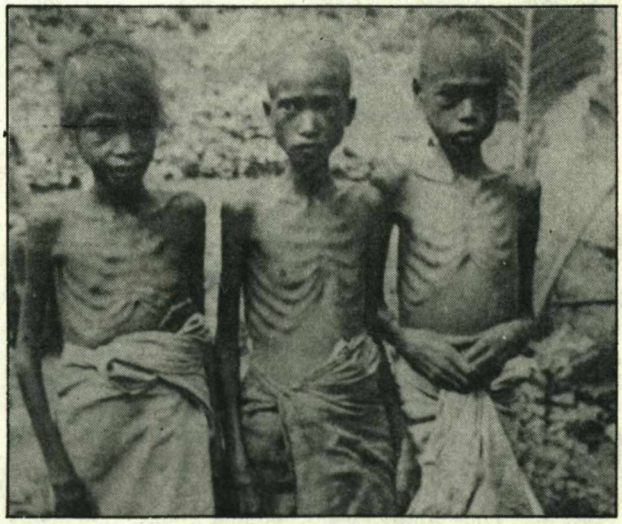
Two days after the invasion, Kingston-area MP Douglas Alkenbrack (PC) asked the only question ever put forward on East Timor in the House of Commons: Why was the Canadian government going to invest taxpayers' money in a pulp and paper plant in Indonesia "in view of the recent invasion by Indonesia of Portuguese Timor and of the apparent corrupt and barbaric regime of President Suharto?"

"I do not share the honourable member's premise," was Prime Minister Trudeau's eight-word reply.

Within months of the invasion, Canada extended an over $200 million line of credit to Indonesia, implicitly sanctioning the slaughter. For the next three years East Timor was completely cut off while the Indonesian military murdered and starved to death thousands of East Timorese. In 1978 the army lifted its veil of secrecy — slightly.

Glen Shortliffe, Canada's Ambassador to Indonesia, was part of the first hand-picked party of diplomats and journalists given a "conducted tour" of East Timor in 1978. According to the journalists, Shortliffe was shocked by what he saw. Shortliffe told the reporters that the Timorese people "were in deplorable condition. They are starving in many cases; they are desperately ill; they need help in terms of immediate relief — food, clothing, basic medical care." Shortliffe wrote a report for the Canadian government; External Affairs' refused to release it.

"The genocide and starvation was the result of the full-scale incendiary bombing by Indonesian forces," said one Timorese priest at the time of the Canadian visit in 1978. Bombing the refugees down from their mountain hiding places, Indonesian troops herded the starving Timorese into



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military-run "resettlement" camps. In 1979, Indonesia finally allowed the International Red Cross limited access to East Timor for the first time. Relief workers were shocked by what they saw: one experienced Red Cross official called conditions worse than anything he had seen in famine-stricken Cambodia or Biafra.

At the same time, former Conservative External Affairs Minister Flora MacDonald told a Kingston newspaper that her department "never considered (East Timor) important enough" to brief her on it.

Indonesian Army Colonel A.P. Kalangie, widely regarded as East Timor's de facto ruler, likened the Indonesian takeover to Soviet actions in Afghanistan during a rare interview with the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* Rod Nordland in 1982.

"You don't give a little bit, you go all at once," said Kalangie. "Like what we did here, is all at once — bok! — and then explain to the rest of the world that we are here. That is how to do it, like the Russians in Afghanistan."

Canada has been sharply critical of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, "strongly endorsing" a 1980 UN resolution calling for "the immediate withdrawal of foreign troops and reaffirming the right of the Afghan people to self-determination." At the same time, Canada gave $13 million worth of aid to Afghan refugees, according to External Affairs' 1981 Annual Review.

More than a year after Ambassador Shortliffe's visit. Canada donated a mere $200,000 to the International Red Cross for East Timor. Then Canada promptly voted against a UN resolution on self-determination and humanitarian assistance for East Timor in 1980, the very next year. "The situation is a *fait accompli*," says Gardiner Wilson, Deputy Director of External Affairs in Ottawa. "The UN resolutions do not reflect present political realities or the humanitarian aid development needs of the people of East Timor," he claims.

The "*fait accompli*" is completely contradicted by refugee and church reports from the island. According to the latest letter from East Timor's acting Bishop, Msgr. Carlos Belo, "war is clearly expanding" and resistance is widespread. The letter, dated January 1, 1985 and smuggled out through religious channels to Portugal, said the Indonesian military was conscripting Timorese children to fight against Fretilin and was killing peasants in reprisals for guerrilla attacks.

Fretilin is still carrying out hit-and-run attacks against the Indonesian army, and most of the population supports the resistance, according to church sources. In fact, in late 1983, Indonesia sent 15,000 new troops to put down resistance in the territory. The troops are still there today.

In the meantime, conditions in East Timor have grown worse. According to a letter, dated February 16, 1984, from Msgr. Belo to his predecessor in Lisbon, the church itself — the last refuge for the Timorese — has come under attack.

"The Church is being persecuted and accused and our schools are being searched and the students are being interrogated," wrote Belo. Recent letters from other Timorese corroborate Msgr. Belo's claims. One letter also refers to Indonesian troops of the elite Red Beret unit torturing to death two Timorese conscripts with "nails, cigarette butts, and razor blades."

In response to these allegations, External Affairs' Gardiner Wilson maintains that they are "perhaps not quite accurate." He agrees that there were human rights violations in the past. "It was a very difficult period," he says, "but these are things that happened upwards of 5, 6, 7, 8 years ago. The situation is now quite different than it was then."

"I'm astonished that External Affairs said that," exclaimed Brian Cameron, Amnesty International's spokesperson in Ottawa. "For the last six years we've been providing External Affairs with information that shows a systematic pattern of human rights violations."

In 1983, Amnesty publicized an 82-page manual issued to occupying forces in East Timor by the Indonesian military command. Written in Indonesian and verified as authentic by experts on Indonesia, the manual clearly describes Fretilin as a powerful opponent. The authors, military officers Williem da Costa and Col. A. Sahala Rajagukguk, outlined the highly developed Fretilin network in the island's towns and villages and gave advice on how to combat the guerrillas and their sympathizers. Neither negotiations nor ceasefires were considered, while methods of coercion and torture were discussed.

One section of the manual instructs the forces on how to torture so that "the antipathy of the people is not aroused." It recommends: "Avoid taking photographs showing torture in progress — people being photographed at times when they are being subjected to electric shock, when they have been stripped naked..."

Indonesia denies the existence of such a manual.

Last September, Indonesia declared East Timor an official transmigration area, opening the way for it to ship some of Indonesia's 160 million citizens from the crowded central islands to the disputed Portuguese colony.

Most recently, in a candid and courageous letter to the Indonesian government, East Timor's Bishop Belo described the "upheaval of gigantic and tragic proportions in East Timor," and defended those fighting for independence. In the letter, dated January 1, 1985, Belo told of "the arrests, disappearances and the deportation of thousands of civilians."

In a detailed account of army abuses Bishop Belo listed:

- "Successive, systematic and regular 'cleaning-up operations' of the Indonesian army against centres of resistance."
- "the permanent threat of reprisals with summary execution by shooting"
- "waves of arrests of villagers, even the most simple and humble peasants"
- "the concentration of the population in resettlement camps in inhuman conditions."

With thousands of native Timorese turning to the Catholic Church for refuge, Belo said the army was "accusing priests, arresting those who teach the catechism, banishing and slaughtering the Christians."

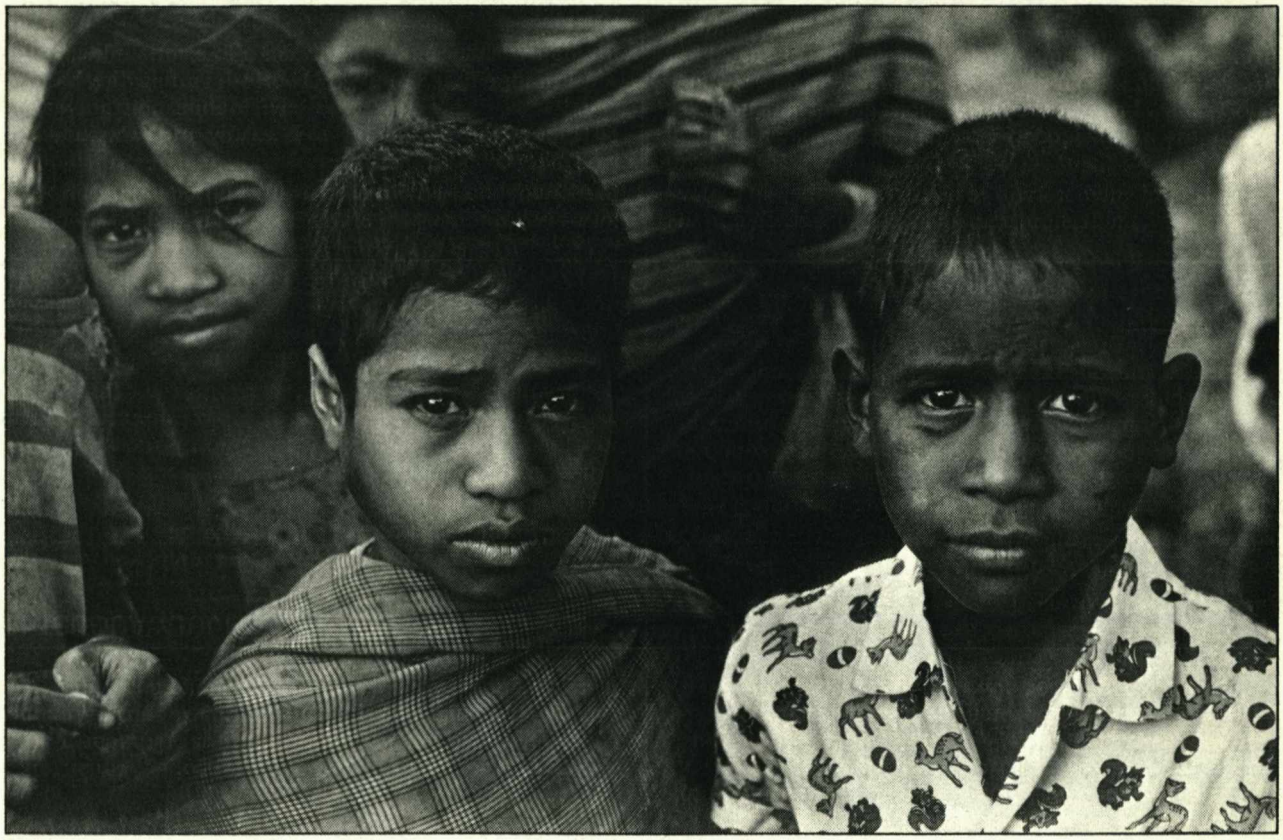
"The attempt to indonesianize the Timorese people through powerful Pancasila campaigns (Indonesian state ideology), schooling and media," warned Belo, "represents a slow assassination of the Timorese culture. To kill their culture is to kill the people themselves."

The Canadian government has made no move to criticize Indonesia. On the contrary, our leaders have gone so far as to eagerly promote and subsidize Canadian weapons sales to the Indonesian army.

Ammunition from two Quebec military companies, radar and radios from Litton Systems and Canadian Marconi, "military vehicles" (probably tanks) from Levy Auto Parts, seven military transport planes from de Havilland, and probably hovercraft from Bell Aerospace Textron have all gone to the Indonesian military likely for use against the Timorese.

All this despite an official Canadian policy of not sending arms to "conflict areas."

Furthermore, new information has come to light des-



Children from a mountain village near the East Timorese border

cribing Canada's very *first* arms show in Indonesia, occurring only last fall. According to sources at External Affairs (which footed the bill), the arms show — staged in Djakarta's Mandarin Hotel — attracted "a large number of agents as well as representatives from all four of Indonesia's armed forces."

Ten Canadian companies pushed their weapons and accessories, including Canadian Marconi, Raytheon, CAE, Computing Devices and Spar.

Before joining the show, Computing Devices' salesperson Jack Warner said Canada "would be competing with South Korea to be *the military technology centre in the Far East.*"

Canada is already a powerful economic force in Indonesia. Represented by companies like Inco, Alcan, and Bata, Canada ranks as Indonesia's third largest foreign investor. With over $1 billion invested there our standing is ahead even of the United States, and makes us Indonesia's largest Western investor. And Canadian aid to Indonesia has soared since 1975 (this year Canada gave Indonesia $23 million), making that country the largest non-Commonwealth recipient of Canadian aid.

This gives Canada unique leverage with the image-conscious Indonesian government. Canada could push for a ceasefire, free access for the International Red Cross, and a UN-supervised referendum on self-determination for East Timor.

It was the efforts of a handful of Americans which are credited with getting the Red Cross into East Timor in 1979, thus saving thousands of lives.

Public pressure works. For us not to act would be criminal. □

Derek Rasmussen is an Ottawa peace activist and founder of the Indonesia East Timor Program, a church-funded social justice organization. Address: P.O. Box 1672, Peterborough, Ont. K9J 7S4, phone (705) 748-1554. Thanks to Julia Morrigan for assistance with this article. Earlier versions of this article appeared in the Kingston Whig-Standard *and the* Nuclear Free Press.

Letter from priest in East Timor

November 1977

Dear friends,

I miss you very much... My spirit is so distraught as to be able to give only a poor picture of myself and of the reality of East Timor today. But I am going to try. I am thin like a toothpick, without shoes, almost without clothes, sick...and much more.

The war planes don't stop all day long. There are hundreds of human beings who die daily. The bodies of the victims become food for the vultures (if we don't die of the war, we die of the plague), villages have been completely destroyed... The barbarities, the cruelties, the pillaging, the unqualified destruction of East Timor, the executions without reason — in a word all the "organized" evil — have spread deep roots in Timor. There is complete insecurity **and the terror of being imprisoned is our daily bread (I am on the "persona non grata" list and any day I could disappear). Genocide will come soon... Integration is not the will of the** people.

Please do something positive for the liberty of the Timorese people. The world ignores us and our grief... We ask all justice-loving people to save Timor and we ask God to forgive the sins of the Timorese people... We are all very tired.

(Note: This letter was written by a priest living in East Timor. His name was withheld for his own protection.)

photo: Elaine Brière